



Typical weed digger (left) and an asparagus knife (right). Photo courtesy of Paul Foerster, BCMG.

In Praise of the Asparagus Knife for Weeding

by Paul Foerster
Bexar County Master Gardener

With the cooler temperatures and ample rain so far this summer, weeds have become an issue in my garden, and perhaps in yours. My push-pull hoe is good but has two drawbacks. One is a rather wide swath that endangers nearby plants you want to save. The other is that it cuts off the weed tops but leaves deeper roots that later resprout.

A typical weed digger, as shown on the left in the photo from my garage, can be used to address those drawbacks. But the narrowness of the blade increases the amount of time you must spend on your knees—a real consideration for someone with 86-year-old knees like mine. A better option, with a wider blade is shown on the right. I discovered that it is called an **asparagus knife** because its original use is for cutting ripe asparagus spears by pushing it into the spear just below the soil line.

A more subtle advantage of using the asparagus knife rather than the traditional weed digger emerges if you consider the physics. Digging weeds involves pushing the digger into the soil nearby and *prying* out the root system. The wide “shoulder” of the blade doesn’t sink in when you pry as does the round shank on the other digger. The result is a fulcrum close to the cutting edge and longer lever arm, giving a higher mechanical advantage. Of course, I do resort to the “sharp-shooter” spade for really deep-rooted “weeds” like the sprouting pecan trees the squirrels have planted.

As an aside, the black rubber chair leg cap was added “after-market” to make the tool easier on the hand. And the pink duct tape makes the tool easier to spot when you have set it down among the weeds. It also helps me recognize which tools are mine when I am doing Master Gardener volunteer work.

Happy gardening!